



National Brownfields Assessment Pilot *West Central Municipal Conference, IL*

Outreach and Special Projects Staff (5101)

Quick Reference Fact Sheet

EPA's Brownfields Economic Redevelopment Initiative is designed to empower States, communities, and other stakeholders in economic redevelopment to work together in a timely manner to prevent, assess, safely clean up, and sustainably reuse brownfields. A brownfield is a site, or portion thereof, that has actual or perceived contamination and an active potential for redevelopment or reuse. Between 1995 and 1996, EPA funded 76 National and Regional Brownfields Assessment Pilots, at up to \$200,000 each, to support creative two-year explorations and demonstrations of brownfields solutions. EPA is funding more than 27 Pilots in 1997. The Pilots are intended to provide EPA, States, Tribes, municipalities, and communities with useful information and strategies as they continue to seek new methods to promote a unified approach to site assessment, environmental cleanup, and redevelopment.

BACKGROUND

EPA selected the West Central Municipal Conference (WCMC) for a Brownfields Pilot. The WCMC is a regional group of 36 municipalities representing over 520,000 people and covering approximately 200 square miles in suburban Cook County, Illinois. The WCMC communities are mature "inner ring" suburbs that have recently experienced a steady loss of jobs and population as businesses have relocated to "greenfields" sites in more rural areas. Left behind are an increasing number of abandoned and under-used industrial sites, many of which are contaminated with hazardous substances.

OBJECTIVES

The main focus of the WCMC Pilot is to develop a regional approach to facilitating redevelopment of brownfields for which WCMC is responsible, and thereby help mayors and economic development officials understand and overcome the concerns of prospective developers and neighboring communities. The concerns which need to be addressed include potential liability, site investigation costs, cleanup costs, and lack of available financing. The WCMC and its related economic development agency

PILOT SNAPSHOT



Cook County, Illinois

Date of Award:
September 1995

Amount: \$200,000

Site Profile: The Pilot targets two privately-owned and two publicly-owned brownfields within the 200-square mile WCMC in suburban Cook County.

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hope to stimulate private investment and the creation of jobs; revitalize the industrial and commercial sectors; and strengthen the local tax base.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ACTIVITIES

The Pilot has:

- Created a “Rapid Response Team,” comprised of experts in legal and environmental issues, real estate, community involvement and regulatory requirements, to provide timely expertise and guidance to property owners, developers, real estate brokers, communities, and municipal officials on brownfields redevelopment;
- Initiated the site selection process. The WCMC is receiving and reviewing applications from local municipalities and private property owners;
- Developed a portable display to keep the general public up-to-date on the process of brownfields remediation. This six panel, multi-color display is designed to be exhibited in village halls, libraries, and at civic events. The Villages of Stickney and LaGrange have hosted the display; and
- Developed an outreach program targeting municipalities, businesses, civic groups, and community groups.

The Pilot is:

- Supporting the redevelopment of at least two privately-owned and two publicly-owned brownfields, which will include identifying candidate sites, performing site assessments, and determining cleanup cost estimates and standards targeted at likely future land use;
- Establishing a Brownfields Prevention Program to identify ongoing industrial activities that pose a risk of creating new brownfields and to develop a strategy for strengthening community-municipal-industry partnerships to encourage environmentally sound community development; and

- Investigating alternative financing mechanisms to fund cleanup and redevelopment of brownfields sites - specifically, alternative sources of public sector financing to identify the methods which hold promise for future site cleanups, including Community Development Block Grant Program, Empowerment Zones and Tax Increment Financing.

LEVERAGING OTHER ACTIVITIES

Experience with the West Central Municipal Conference Pilot has been a catalyst for related activities including the following.

- Discussions with area lending institutions to develop a revolving loan pool are currently in the preliminary stages. Funds would be made available for the remediation and redevelopment of brownfield properties.
- In June 1996, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) offered the use of their Redevelopment Assessment program, at no cost, to perform abbreviated Phase I and II environmental assessments. EPA Region 5 used their Mobile Laboratory to conduct limited surface soil analysis to determine possible environmental problems.
- The Department of Commerce outlined a number of grants that municipalities can use for the cleanup of brownfield properties. Through the Economic Development Administration's Technical Assistance Program, funds are available for inventorying potential sites, market analysis, and Phase I Assessments.
- A meeting took place between the Illinois Development Finance Authority, members of the West Cook Community Development Corporation, and the Rockford Council of 100 to learn about funding a project underway in Rockford. Currently the West Cook Community Development Corporation's Finance Committee is reviewing the Rockford plan.
- Participated in the Triton Community College National Community Education Day. The WCMC made its outreach materials available to the over a hundred community leaders, public officials, and concerned residents attending the conference.